

(19)



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European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 0 837 502 A2

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
22.04.1998 Bulletin 1998/17

(51) Int Cl.⁶: **H01L 23/26**

(21) Application number: **97308173.0**

(22) Date of filing: **15.10.1997**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE CH DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU MC
NL PT SE**
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV RO SI

(30) Priority: **15.10.1996 US 28541 P**

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(54) Improvements in or relating to hydrogen gettering

(57) A method, system and materials for use in hydrogen gettering in conjunction with microelectronic and microwave components that are generally hermetically sealed in an enclosure typically referred to as a "package". Gettering materials that can be used include titanium with or without a hydrogen permeable coating or

covering, alloys of zirconium-vanadium iron and zeolites and several ways to apply these materials to the package. In addition, the hydrogen permeable material can be used over a vent from the interior of the package to the exterior wherein hydrogen will escape from the package interior when the hydrogen concentration within the package is greater than without the package.

Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a method, system and materials for use in hydrogen gettering and can be provided in conjunction with microelectronic and microwave components that are generally hermetically sealed in an enclosure typically referred to as a "package".

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

The effect of molecular and atomic hydrogen is of particular concern for hermetically sealed microelectronic devices, generally those containing group III-V semiconductor materials and specifically gallium arsenide microwave integrated circuits. It is known that these devices degrade over time and temperature in the presence of even small amounts of molecular and atomic hydrogen. The amount of hydrogen which is tolerable depends upon the end use of the device and the required life expectancy thereof. In general, the presence of hydrogen in amounts of about 10 parts per million or less are tolerable but not easily obtainable. The mechanism under which this degradation occurs has been hypothesized by several sources, however there is no agreement at present as to the mechanism causing such degradation.

It is known that prior proposals to alleviate this problem have been made using organic hydrogen getter materials or inorganic getter materials in conjunction with an organic binder. The purpose of the getter is to capture as much as possible of the free gaseous hydrogen within the package interior, consequently decreasing or eliminating the rate of degradation of the hydrogen degradable material within the package, specifically gallium arsenide microwave integrated circuits and/or other hydrogen sensitive devices. The organic materials are generally unsatisfactory because they are: 1) limited in temperature range and/or 2) are reversible such that previously captured hydrogen may be released at elevated temperatures or with time and/or 3) because the getter rate decreases with time at temperature, ultimately limiting the temperature and/or length of time that the getter will function. It follows that other empirical approaches are required to minimize the above described problem.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Respective aspects of the present invention are set forth claims 1, 8, and 19.

In accordance with the present invention, the approaches taken to minimize the problem as discussed above involve the use of a getter of several different types and formed in several diverse manners.

One such getter involves the application of a transition metal, preferably nickel, palladium or platinum, us-

ing physical vapor deposition or electroplating. The deposited transition metal can be used in the pure metallic state or prepared as an oxide of the metal. In the pure form, transition metals such as platinum, palladium and nickel are known to absorb significant amounts of hydrogen without appreciable increase in the volume of the metal. In addition, the hydrogen can react with the pure metal to form hydrides and further getter the hydrogen. Also, the transition metals such as nickel, palladium and platinum can be oxidized to form a transition metal oxide through oxidation of the metal surface. In operation, the transition metal oxide reacts with hydrogen to form the elemental metal and water. A water getter can be included in the package to prevent accumulation of excessive levels of water vapor. The metal can be oxidized by a number of techniques, including thermal oxidation, plasma oxidation or chemical anodization. An alternate method of preparing the metal oxide is by direct sputter deposition of the metal oxide or by using reactive sputtering of the metal in an oxygen environment. The stoichiometry of the oxide is controlled to select the desired oxide type (e.g., PdO), such as, for example, through control of the reactive sputter deposition parameters.

The getter application location and/or size for both metal and metal oxide area are controlled by physical deposition masks, selective plating using plating masks or selective etching of the metal or metal oxide. Etching techniques include chemical or physical techniques. The getter is applied anywhere in the package interior and sized to assure any hydrogen within the package interior is completely captured. This approach has many advantages in that a very thin layer of metal or metal oxide can be formed, adding negligible weight or thickness to the package. Further, the described inorganic getters do not suffer from the temperature limitations of organic getters. In addition, a number of transition metals and/or metal oxides including those referenced above react with hydrogen over a wide temperature range and irreversibly getter hydrogen.

A specific approach to the problem is to utilize titanium as a housing or lid with or without a hydrogen permeable coating on the titanium. A desired hydrogen permeable coating is palladium which can be plated or vacuum deposited on top of the titanium. The purpose of the palladium is to prevent the titanium from oxidizing or otherwise being hydrogen getter inhibited. The titanium can also be used in bulk or sheet form as a discrete component which is adhesively or otherwise attached within the module. The surface area of the titanium can be substantially increased by forming a porous titanium structure, thus substantially increasing the rate of hydrogen gettering and decreasing the weight of the getter.

A second approach is to sputter, ion beam or otherwise vacuum coat a lid and/or housing with titanium to form a getter. The titanium can be overcoated in the vacuum deposition with a hydrogen permeable membrane such as palladium. This approach offers a very

light weight getter with high surface area and excellent adhesion to metal oxides due to the high Gibbs free energy of oxide formation of titanium.

A third approach is to sputter deposit zirconium-vanadium-iron alloys with or without addition of one or more oxides of rare earth metals. These materials have shown hydrogen gettering characteristics in bulk form. The sputter deposited approach offers the unique advantages of light weight within a package, high surface area and good adhesion.

A fourth approach is to mix powders of titanium, palladium coated titanium or zirconium-vanadium-iron in an organic vehicle and screen print or otherwise dispense the material within a packaged module.

A fifth approach is to plate a hydrogen permeable but water impermeable membrane such as palladium onto a lid or other location in a nodule and etch or otherwise machine the support structure beneath the palladium to form a hydrogen permeable vent to the exterior of the package. This approach can also be incorporated into a hydrogen permeable plug or feedthrough that is soldered or welded to a housing or lid.

A sixth approach is to sputter deposit onto the interior surface of the package or nodule zirconium-vanadium-iron alloys with or without the additions of oxides of rare earth metals.

A further approach is to provide any hydrogen getter material including those named above which can be prepared in particulate or powder form. In application, the hydrogen and/or water getter material is ground or otherwise formed into a particulate or powder such that the particulate getter is mixed with an organic binder and screen printed on the desired surface. The binder is selected such that, upon screen printing and curing, the binder assures adhesive attachment of the getter to the desired surface and the binder allows permeability of the hydrogen or water through the binder and to the getter material. Typical binders that can be used include silicones, epoxies, acrylics, urethanes, polyimides and benzocyclobutene. A further benefit of this method of application is that the surface area of the getter in the mixed binder can be increased and controlled by varying the getter particulate size and thickness of the screen printed material. The screen printed method eliminates the need for forming the getter in bulk form, patterning or sizing it and adhesively attaching it within the hermetically sealed package in three separate operations. By the present technique, the hydrogen and or water getter is premixed with the binder and patterned, and adhesively attached in one operation, eliminating the separate, bulk material formation, sizing or patterning and adhesive attachment operations.

The screen printing method of getter attachment can also be extended to include an RF absorber material mixed with the hydrogen and/or water getter. The benefit of this method of application is that radio frequency absorber materials, including binders, commonly used today, release hydrogen in the curing process and after

the curing process when installed in a package. By incorporating the hydrogen and/or water getter with the RF absorbing material in the presence of a binder, the additional absorber attachment process is eliminated. In addition, the getter is in intimate contact with the hydrogen releasing absorber material and will provide a more effective getter.

A still further method relates to the attachment of the getter to the interior of the microelectronic or microwave hermetically sealed enclosure using a numerically controlled placement and pump-dispensing system. Using this method, the inorganic getter is reduced to the desired particulate size and mixed with an epoxy or other organic binder and dispensed with precise thickness and dimensional placement control within the package interior. The RF absorber material can similarly be applied by itself or premixed with the hydrogen and/or water getter. Using this method of dispensing and application of the getter and/or radio frequency absorber, the pre-mixed material in paste form can also be used to attach components, eliminating multiple operations and combining component attachment, hydrogen getter attachment, water getter attachment and radio frequency absorber attachment or any combination thereof in a single operation with resultant savings in assembly time and savings of physical space within the interior of the module.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

In accordance with a first embodiment of the invention, a transition metal, preferably nickel, palladium or platinum, is applied to a package interior surface using sputtering, physical vapor deposition or electroplating. The deposited transition metal is deposited in the pure metallic state or prepared as an oxide of the metal. A gallium arsenide semiconductor device is then placed in the package interior and the package is hermetically sealed to provide the final device with hydrogen gettering activity. All of the steps are standard except for the additional step of providing the particular hydrogen getter. A water getter can be included in the package to prevent accumulation of excessive levels of water vapor, especially in the case where a metal oxide is reduced by the hydrogen to form elemental metal and water.

In accordance with a second embodiment of the invention, elemental titanium is used as a housing or package or as a lid for the housing or package with a hydrogen permeable coating on the titanium at the package hollow interior. The titanium can alternatively be used in bulk, sheet or porous form as a discrete component which is adhesively or otherwise attached within the package or module. The surface of the titanium over which a palladium layer is formed is preferably substantially oxide-free to provide improved hydrogen gettering activity by the titanium. The titanium can also be provid-

ed on the interior surface of a module by sputtering, ion beam or otherwise vacuum coating a lid and/or housing with titanium to form the getter. The titanium can again be overcoated in situ with a hydrogen permeable membrane such as palladium.

In accordance with a third embodiment of the invention zirconium-vanadium-iron alloys with or without addition of one or more oxides of rare earth metals are sputter deposited onto the interior surface of the package as above.

In accordance with a fourth embodiment of the invention, powders of titanium, palladium coated with titanium or zirconium-vanadium-iron are mixed in an organic vehicle, such as a silicone, epoxy, urethane, acrylic, polyimide or benzocyclobutene and screen printed or otherwise dispensed within a packaged module.

In accordance with a fifth embodiment of the invention, a hydrogen permeable membrane such as palladium is plated onto a lid or other location in a module and the support structure beneath the palladium is etched or otherwise removed to form a hydrogen permeable vent to the exterior of the package. This approach can also be incorporated into a hydrogen permeable plug or feedthrough that is soldered or welded into a housing or lid.

In accordance with a sixth embodiment of the invention, a bulk zeolite or zirconium-vanadium-iron having hydrogen gettering properties is applied by physical vapor deposition, chemical vapor deposition and/or adhesive attachment to the package interior by use of screen printing which precisely controls the location, thickness and dimensions of the coated area.

In accordance with a further embodiment, any hydrogen getter material including those named above which can be prepared in particulate or powder form is mixed with an organic binder of the type set forth above, and screen printed or dispensed using a numerically controlled placement and pump dispensing system onto the desired surface.

Though the invention has been described with reference to specific preferred embodiments thereof, many variations and modifications will immediately become apparent to those skilled in the art.

Claims

1. A device which comprises:

a material which is degradable in the presence of hydrogen;
a package containing said material; and
a layer of a hydrogen getter containing a transition metal disposed within said package.

2. The device of Claim 1, wherein said transition metal is taken from the group consisting of palladium, platinum and nickel and oxides thereof.

3. The device of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein said material comprises a group III-V semiconductor composition.

4. The device of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein said material comprises gallium arsenide.

5. The device of any preceding claim, wherein said package is a hermetic sealing package hermetically sealing said material and said getter within said package.

6. The device of any preceding claim, wherein said hydrogen getter comprises an elemental transition metal.

7. The device of any of Claims 1 to 5 wherein said package comprises an elemental titanium-containing package having a substantially oxide-free interior surface arranged for housing said material therein, said getter comprising a layer of hydrogen permeable palladium disposed on said oxide-free surface between an inner surface of said package and said material.

8. A method of making a package containing a substantially hydrogen-free interior which comprises the steps of:

providing a package having a hollow interior region; and
forming a layer of a hydrogen getter taken from the class consisting of elemental titanium, alloys of vanadium, zirconium and iron having hydrogen gettering properties within said interior region.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein said step of forming said layer comprises forming an elemental titanium and said method, further comprises the step of forming a hydrogen-permeable layer of palladium over said elemental titanium.

10. The method of Claim 8 or Claim 9 further comprising the step of disposing a hydrogen degradable material within said hollow interior.

11. The method of Claim 10 wherein said step of disposing said material comprises disposing a material formed from a group III-V semiconductor compound.

12. The method of Claim 10 or Claim 11 where said step of disposing said material comprises disposing a material comprising gallium arsenide.

13. The method of any of Claims 10 to 12, further comprising hermetically sealing said material within said

package.

14. The method of any of Claims 8 to 13 further comprising forming said layer of hydrogen getter from a mixture of powders of a hydrogen gettering material in an organic vehicle taken from the class consisting of polymeric materials including epoxies, silicones, acrylics, urethanes, polyimides and benzocyclobutene and depositing said mixture within said hollow interior region.

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15. The method of Claim 14, further comprising depositing said mixture by one of screen printing and a numerically controlled placement and dispensing pump.

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16. The method of any of Claims 8 to 15 further comprising forming a vent through said package from said hollow interior region to the exterior of said package and forming a hydrogen permeable layer over said vent.

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17. The method of any of Claims 8 to 16, wherein said step of forming said hydrogen permeable layer comprises forming a layer of palladium.

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18. The method of any of claims 8 to 17 further comprising the step of placing said package in an environment where the concentration of hydrogen is less than the concentration of hydrogen in said hollow region.

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19. A method providing hydrogen gettering properties to a device which method comprising:

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providing a hydrogen getter material in one of powder or particulate form;

mixing said getter material with a binder capable of attaching said getter material to a predetermined surface; and

adhering the mixture of getter material and binder to said surface.

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20. The method of Claim 19, wherein said step of adhering comprises the steps of screen printing said mixture onto a surface and then curing said mixture.

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21. The method of Claim 19 or Claim 20 further comprising the step of mixing an RF absorber material with said getter material and binder.

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